



## An Icy Ride I Won't Forget

By AT3(NAC) Jeffrey Rau,  
HC-6

It had been a typical workweek in the squadron; however, my weekend visit with family and friends in Philadelphia would be anything but typical.

The trip from Norfolk went OK. I arrived at my father's house and slept until about noon on Saturday, then went to visit a friend who lived 10 miles down the road. I spent the afternoon with her and her family before she and I started back to my father's place at 1630. It had been snowing, and I immediately noticed the roads had iced over.

I held my speed to 35 mph, which I felt was reasonable, given the conditions. I learned otherwise, though, when I came to a curve in the road. The rear of the car started sliding, so I corrected my steering. In no time, the car was sliding the other way, so I corrected again, with the same results as before. By now, I was heading toward oncoming traffic, and nothing I did seemed to make any difference.

Before long, my car spun 180 degrees, and, as I glanced in the rearview mirror, I saw a car coming straight at me. The next thing I remembered was waking up with my friend shaking my leg and asking, "Are you injured?"



In a minute or so, I said my neck hurt, but I thought I otherwise was OK. As I looked around after being knocked unconscious, I realized both air bags had deployed. The car was filled with white smoke from the explosion.

I suffered a concussion and minor head, neck and back trauma, and my friend had some neck pain for 24 hours. My car was totaled. The police who responded said my friend and I probably would have died if we hadn't been wearing our seat belts and the dual-side air bags hadn't deployed.

My biggest regret was that I missed two weeks of flying, which meant someone else had to pick up my slack. I should have practiced the ORM I'm always hearing about at work. If I had taken time to assess the risks that day, the outcome likely would have been better. ✖

## Our First Christmas in a New Home

By ATCS James Cassell,  
VAW-117

Holiday safety is a subject we cover every season, and, still, one or two people never seem to get the message. I always had said, "That never will happen to me," until my wife and I spent our first Christmas in a new home. We had bought it just three months earlier and were looking forward to the holidays.



When it came time for me to hang the Christmas lights, I thought I was following all the rules. I had found a sturdy ladder, pre-checked the lights, filled my favorite staple gun, and made sure I needed only one extension cord—I didn't want to overload any circuit. The one thing I didn't do was consider the type of roof that was on our house—slick, red tiles.

I had taken only three steps onto the roof when suddenly I found the ground rushing up to meet me. I had read about so many people stepping off

ladders and the ladder then giving way or slipping, so I had my wife hold the ladder. That precaution, however, didn't help me as I was sliding off the roof. Luckily, nothing but my pride was hurt, and, after a few minutes of re-thinking the situation, I decided I could do everything from the ladder. It would take longer; however, I wouldn't have to listen to my neighbors laughing any harder than they already were.

The job went smoothly this time, and I felt good standing back and admiring my accomplishment. The victory celebration didn't last long, though. Shortly after I asked my wife to turn on the lights, a neighbor shouted that smoke was coming from under the gutter on the far side of the house. About the same time, everything went black.

An investigation revealed I had pierced one of the wires while stapling the lights to the house. The whole set had shorted out and melted two inches of wire. It could have been worse; I could have burned down my new house.

In the future, I'll listen more closely to those holiday lectures. I'll also use hangers around the house for stringing lights and leave the staple gun in the garage. **A**

## Surviving a 200-Foot Plunge

By A02 Correy Retzlöff,  
VR-54

Ever have one of those dreams where you drive off a cliff and just keep falling? The real thing happened to me.

I had gone home to Springfield, Ore., one Christmas for bluejacket HARP duty. I enjoyed helping my hometown recruiters sell the Navy and telling friends what I was doing in the Navy. After a slow day, I decided to take care of some personal business at a recruiting office in nearby Eureka, Calif.

I had made the trip and was on my way back to Springfield through the snow-covered mountain pass of Highway 101 when my adventure started. I was driving as slowly and defensively as possible coming down a hill, going into a turn, when the car hit some clear ice and spun out of control. It slid off the roadway and plunged 200 feet down an embankment. Once it reached the bottom of the ravine, I unbuckled my seat belt, moved the air bag aside, and climbed out of the car.

With the snow showers increasing, and the sun falling behind the mountain peaks, I scrambled up the hillside as fast as I could. I knew I needed to get to the top of the ravine before sunset.

When I reached the top, a good Samaritan who had witnessed my mishap rendered first aid until an ambulance arrived. The paramedics kept asking, "How are you still alive? I don't understand why we're not pulling your body out of that car."

I attributed my survival to the seat belt and air bag in my 1995 Toyota Celica. My only injuries were a bruised shoulder and a scratched nose. **A**



## Close to a "Charged" Experience

By Lt. Paul Berthelotte,  
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It was a simple job, especially for a former electrical officer. All I had to do was secure power at the source and replace an old outlet plug with a new one.

I went into the garage and threw the switch that turned off the light I had left on in the room, then went back inside and started to work. Because it was July, and I was sweating a lot, I was wearing heavy leather gloves. There were no problems until I disconnected the wires from the old plug and began pulling them out of the outlet box.

Two of the wires touched for a split second, and I saw a bright flash of light. Then I smelled something burning, which told me the power wasn't secured. In other words, I had been working on exposed, live wires for the last five minutes. I had come closer than I ever wanted to finding out if what I've always heard is true: It's not the volts that kill you, it's the amps.

I immediately put down the two wires so they weren't touching anything, went back to the garage, and flipped the master switch. I figured the food in the refrigerator—cold beer and pizza—could last the 10 minutes it would take me to finish the job. When I was done, I put a cover on the new outlet, tested everything, and started the next item on my to-do list.

Since that incident, I always protect myself and throw the master switch when working on anything electrical around the house. **A**

*The author was assigned to the Naval Safety Center when he wrote this article.*